

EPP Group Report

Issue 2 / February 2011



EU patent to make Europe more competitive

A single EU Patent is one of the flagship initiatives of the Internal Market. While intellectual property is the only sustainable resource in Europe, its protection is still not unified, but fragmented. This makes patents in Europe more expensive than in competing markets such as the US, China or Japan. Discussions on an EU patent have been going on for almost 30 years, and the last proposal of the European Commission dates back to 2001. The reason the EU has failed to establish a cross-border patent system is a dispute between Member States on a language regime: would applications for new patents have to be submitted in all EU languages?

The European Parliament this week agreed to go ahead with a restricted language regime that would require the patent claim to be submitted in English, French or German. 25 Member States, with the exception of Italy and Spain, have expressed their willingness to join the so-called 'enhanced cooperation' procedure. With the consent of the European Parliament, an efficient and cost-saving patent system in the EU could be established by the end of the year.

Thomas Bickl

Egypt: A message for reform to the whole Arab world

By Eva Mitsopoulou

"The departure of Hosni Mubarak signals the transition towards a pluralistic democracy responding to the aspirations of the Egyptian People", said EPP Group Vice-Chairman Ioannis Kasoulides (CY) in the plenary debate of the European Parliament on the situation in Egypt.

In his intervention in plenary, Ioannis Kasoulides stressed the responsibility the Egyptian Armed Forces now have towards leading their country, for a short period of time, to a genuine democracy, rule of law, independent judiciary, good governance and accountability in suspected cases of corruption.

"The Military Leadership is cautioned not to disappoint the youth that was at the forefront of the demonstrations, representatives of whom should be called on to

play their role in building democracy during the transition", Mr Kasoulides continued.

Ioannis Kasoulides emphasised the strong message by the Egyptian people to the whole Arab world. "The Arab countries are our partners; we have no intention of patronising nor imposing anything from the outside. The message though for them, as sent by the Egyptians and the Tunisians, is REFORM and reform NOW. Democratise, govern well, fight corruption or face the wrath of the people", he concluded.

During the plenary debate, attention was also drawn to the commitments made by the Supreme Military Council to revise the Constitution, to hold parliamentary and Presidential elections, to honour international Treaties and obligations and to limit military rule to six months. It was mentioned that there are already reports on the first steps taken whilst the proposal for a constitutional amendment should be delivered within ten days and submitted to popular vote within two months, paving the way towards democratic, free and fair elections later in the year.

The Resolution adopted by the plenary of the European Parliament winding up the debate on the situation in Egypt expresses its solidarity with the Egyptian people, applauds their courage and determination and strongly condemns the violence and disproportionate force used against protesters.

Croatia deserves to have its efforts rewarded in June

By Lada Jurica

The European Parliament voted on the Report on Croatia this week, in which it supported this June 2011 as the target date to conclude accession negotiations. This wording was based on amendments tabled by the EPP Group Spokesman on Croatia, Bernd Posselt (D), in the Foreign Affairs Committee, and defended by a majority of the European Parliament against efforts of the Green Group to delete this date.

As main speaker of the EPP Group, Posselt underlined: "Croatia is running the last metres of EU accession negotiations." He recalled the country's long way towards European integration. "It is now more than twenty years since the building of democracy in Croatia. One year later, on 28 June 1991, there was the brutal attack of the Yugoslav People's Army on Vukovar. I was in Vukovar when this flowering small model of Europe was destroyed and thousands of people lost their homes and lives."

Posselt stated that he had accompanied Croatia along the path for a long time, and it has undergone enormous efforts. "This Report means fairness for Croatia - not privileges or discounts, but fairness. Croatia is ready for accession. We stand

by the fact that criteria must be kept, but we urge for fair treatment and no artificial obstacles."

"Croatia belongs in an historical context with Slovenia and Hungary, but for certain facts, it should have been taken into the European Union at the same time, as a country of Central Europe", concluded Posselt.

Croatia is expected to end accession negotiations in June, provided it fulfils the necessary criteria. If this timetable is kept, it would mean that this is the last progress report for Croatia on the European Parliament's agenda. Next will be the Croatian Accession Treaty. The European Parliament will have the chance to be the first Parliament to put its signature on the document that will make Croatia the 28th Member State of the European Union.

Fake medicines in the EU: putting an end to the silent epidemic

By Marion Jeanne

"This is a first step towards guaranteeing the origin and quality of medicines available in the European Union", said Françoise Grossetête (F), the EPP Group's Rapporteur on the dossier on fake medicines, following the adoption of the Report on the Directive on the fight against fake medicines by an overwhelming majority (569 in favour, 12 against and 7 abstentions) in the plenary session of the European Parliament.

"Too many fake medicines get into our supply chains as 'silent killers'. At the end of 2009, the EU carried out custom controls and within only two months, 34 million fake pills were confiscated!", said the MEP.

"I wish to send a message to our citizens who might be tempted to buy medicines on the Internet: they have more than one chance out of two of finding fake medicines. Many 'merchants of death' are hiding behind criminal networks.

Fake Viagra, fake painkillers or fake anti-cancer medicines, counterfeits containing none, or very little real medicine, do not cure illnesses. But too often, when illegal medication contains aluminium or arsenic, the consequences are fatal. This is why the text foresees the enforcement of European inspections of producers of active substances."

"Producing medicine obliges the companies and all actors involved in the supply chain to adhere to a strict regime. This requires identifying each actor's responsibility from the producers, the wholesalers, parallel importers, brokers to the distributors. This regime also forces us to make sure that the traceability of each box of prescribed medicines is guaranteed and furthermore, that they have security systems containing an electronic number that will guarantee the

authenticity and the individual identification of each package. Finally, it requires limiting the number of repackaging stages of boxes that go through the hands of parallel importers.

Pharmacists have an important role to play as they are an essential link in the pharmaceutical chain. We must make sure that they themselves buy quality medicines."

Rising Food Prices: Parliament calls for action

By Cliona Connolly

In adopting a Resolution on rising food prices this week, the European Parliament has responded to concerns about global food security. Mairead McGuinness (IE) welcomed the positive outcome of the vote: "Food should be available at reasonable prices for consumers but a fair standard of living for farmers must also be ensured in order to sustain the agri-food sector. This has not been achieved in the EU, despite the CAP, and must be addressed in future reforms", she said.

"As demand for food grows, we face the challenge of producing more from limited natural resources. We must invest in agriculture in both the developing and developed worlds to secure food production. We must also deal with the impact of unusual weather events and climate change on agriculture production."

Food prices have peaked for the seventh consecutive month between 2010 and 2011, reaching the highest levels since the FAO started measuring food prices in 1990.

Commodity price hikes are a destabilising factor in the global economy and have sparked riots, including in Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt.

The Resolution points to the need to protect farm incomes so that food production in the EU and globally can be secured. It also proposes a targeted global system of food stocks; it deals with concerns about the excesses of speculation and urges the G20 to co-ordinate the creation of preventative mechanisms against the excessive fluctuation of prices and to work towards regulation, designed to tackle food and the agricultural crisis.

European Pensions: EU coordination necessary

By Françoise Verburg-Petit

"Safe, adequate and sustainable is the guarantee we wish to give to European citizens on their pensions. EU coordination is necessary, particularly for the functioning of the internal market, the EU 2020 Strategy and the Stability and Growth Pact. But Member States will keep the lead", said Ria Oomen-Ruijten (NL), presenting her Report on pensions.

Ageing populations in all Member States have put existing retirement systems under massive strain and the financial and economic crisis has only increased this pressure. Unfortunately not all the Member States have put money aside for pensions.

Higher unemployment, slower growth, higher national debt levels and volatility on the financial markets have made it harder for all Member States to deliver on pension promises.

These impacts, on top of the underlying demographic challenge which is now upon us, mean difficult pension reforms can no longer be put off.

Ria Oomen-Ruijten said: "Many Member States have already increased the pension age. It is wise to discuss the link between retirement age and life expectancy but a fixed European retirement age is impossible because of the huge differences in life expectancy in Member States. On the other hand, putting in place measures to encourage the extension of working life, flexibility and adapted pension schemes is something I strongly advocate."

In Member States where employers and employees have saved money, the problem is less urgent. "However, stricter solvency is not adequate; good supervision is also necessary."

Ria Oomen-Ruijten also supports the portability of pensions; it should be an employee's right. But at the same time, considering the diversity and complexity of the various systems, conditions for the portability of pension rights should begin only with new contracts and after an in-depth analysis of the consequences.

Passenger Rights: Green light for bus and coach passengers

By Francesco Frapiccini

The European Parliament gave its final green light to the Regulation on rights of passengers of bus and coach transport on a text on which the Parliament and the Council reached agreement during conciliation at the end of 2010. The 70 million European bus and coach passengers will have now new rights - almost non-existent until today - when compared to other sectors such as air, rail and sea.

This text enhances passenger rights in terms of reimbursement, assistance in cases of accidents, cancellations, delays, with better information and assistance for disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility. The new legislation was foreseen in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity for bus and coach services of more than 250km, even if it does provide a number of basic rights for shorter distances (if less than 250km it provides twelve basic rights in particular for people with disabilities or reduced mobility). In the case of lost or damaged luggage, passengers must also be compensated. It also provides assistance in cases of delays or interruptions of travel as is already in place for trains and planes. In cases of delays or cancellations of more than two hours, passengers will be refunded or an alternative form of transport will be arranged.

"I am highly satisfied with the approval of this text. We will now have a modern legislation that protects those who travel by bus and which provides special protection for disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility also taking into account the bus and coach companies run by SMEs and who have limited financial means", said Antonio Cancian (IT), Rapporteur of this Regulation.

Light Commercial Vehicles: new EU emission standards

By Thomas Bickl

Light commercial vehicles (LCVs) will soon be subject to greenhouse gas emission standards. The European Parliament this week endorsed a new EU Regulation introducing CO₂ limits as of 2014. The new standards are supposed to boost innovation and the competitiveness of European manufacturers. "Green technologies have to be built into the vehicles which need to stay affordable. In any case, there will be substantial savings in the running costs as fuel consumption will drop by around 25 percent by 2020", said Anja Weisgerber (D) who is responsible for the LCV emission standards in the EPP Group.

Starting in 2014, 70 percent of new commercial vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes must comply with an average emission limit of 175 grams CO₂ per kilometre. The percentage increases to 75 percent in 2015 and 80 percent in 2016. As from 2017, all new LCVs have to meet the limit. In 2020, the limit will decrease to 147

grams. If a manufacturer fails to meet the limits, a penalty of €95 per gram per vehicle applies. "We need to lower the greenhouse gas emissions of vans and light commercial vehicles to successfully contribute to fighting global warming. The long-term limit of 147 grams is both ambitious and feasible", said Anja Weisgerber.

The Regulation provides for 'extra incentives' for particularly environmentally-friendly vehicles, such as hybrid or electric vans. "Through such incentives, we can speed up the entry into the market of the respective vehicles. The same goes for so-called eco innovations, such as solar panels or LED bulbs", said the EPP Group Shadow Rapporteur.